

Music Educators' Perceived Effectiveness of Inclusion

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to examine whether music teachers' perceptions of effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement had altered from previous research findings 20 years before. A survey based on that used by Gfeller, Darrow, and Hedden was sent to music educators through the United States and returned by 1,194, with all 50 states represented. Results indicate more positive responses as compared with 20 years ago, with participants generally reporting that the students were successfully integrated, their music needs were being met, and they did not hinder the progress of students without disabilities. Additionally, teachers' responses indicated they were comfortable adapting and/or modifying their regular curriculum to meet the needs of students with special needs and that these students were graded on the same standards of music achievement as the other students in their classes.

Keywords

inclusion, children with disabilities, adaptations and/or modifications, special learners in music, students with special needs

Results of past research on inclusion and mainstreaming practices in music education, specifically in regard to student grade level and music teacher area of instruction, indicated that music educators felt inadequately prepared for working with students

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with special needs in their classrooms (Atterbury, 1986; Frisque, Niebur, & Humphreys, 1994; Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Gilbert & Asmus, 1981; Sideridis & Chandler, 1995; White, 1981/1982). This research, however, was conducted more than 20 years ago, and questions regarding the current relevancy of these data have been raised due to their being “dated, geographically specific, and [using] author-constructed measurement instruments” (Jellison & Taylor, 2007, p. 19). For example, many institutions within the United States offering undergraduate degrees in music education now require course work to prepare preservice teachers to work with students with special needs (Colwell & Thompson, 2000; Heller, 1995; Salvador, 2010), and the National Association for Music Education (NAfME; formerly known as MENC) and public school districts have instituted workshops and in-service training for professionals to continue their education within this area. Additionally, many modifications have been made to national, state, county, and district educational policies related to students with special needs over the more than 20 years since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was first instituted. Thus, it is currently unknown whether these education and policy changes have affected music teachers’ perceptions of preparation.

Related to the advancements in academic training, music education research has begun to establish the efficacy of field experiences in which preservice teachers work with students with special needs. These studies have indicated that such academic training increases preservice music educators’ perceptions of the ability of students with special needs to learn music concepts, improves the preservice teachers’ perceptions of their ability to teach students with special needs effectively (Hourigan, 2009; Kaiser & Johnson, 2000; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2005a, 2007a), improves the ability of preservice teachers to assess accurately the music concept acquisition of students with special needs (VanWeelden & Whipple, 2005b, 2007b), and provides preservice teachers with the tools to create music curriculum adaptations and modifications for students with special needs successfully (Whipple & VanWeelden, 2012).

Still, the extent of such field experiences in academic programs nationwide is unknown, as is the availability of similar professional training for more established teachers already in service. Consequently, we do not know the effects of the broader educational or the aforementioned policy changes on experiences of in-service music educators and their students. Knowing this would equip university music education faculty and school district administrators with information about where to target any remaining or new deficit areas of in-service teachers to educate students with special needs more effectively. Therefore, the purpose of this research project was to examine whether music teachers’ perceptions of effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement had altered from previous research findings 20 years before. The specific research questions for the current study were as follows: (1) Are there differences among music educators’ perceived effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement based on years of teaching experience or specialty area (i.e., elementary general, middle school/high school (MS/HS) choral, or MS/HS instrumental)? (2) How frequently do music

educators address music versus nonmusic objectives as their primary teaching focus when working with students with special needs? and (3) What are the similarities and differences among music educators' perceived effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement found within the current study and the results found within the Gfeller et al. (1990) study?

Method

Music educators teaching band, choir, general music, guitar, orchestra, and other music classes ($N = 5,000$) across the United States were selected randomly from public school websites. To achieve this random selection, lists of all school districts within each state were collected (www.greatschools.org), and each school within the districts was assigned a number. The list of schools was randomized (www.random.org/lists/). Additionally, a list of music education specialty areas was chosen randomly per each school. A music educator's e-mail address to match the randomly chosen specialty area, published on the school website, was obtained. From this master list, 100 teachers per state were selected randomly and were invited to participate in a survey related to their perceptions of effectiveness of inclusion when working with students with special needs in music.

Survey Instrument

The dependent measure was a survey containing a demographic section and questions pertaining to music educators' perceptions of effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, and student achievement when working with students with special needs. Jellison and Taylor (2007) suggested that in order to "track and compare changes across time and groups" (p. 20), surveys should be replicated whenever possible. Therefore, this survey was designed to match the instrument used by Gfeller et al. (1990) as closely as possible, although an exact replication was not feasible due to national, state, and local modifications to terminology, legislation, and educational philosophies over the last two decades. Still, the crux of the items about effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, and student achievement used in the Gfeller et al. study also were used within the current study.

Included in the current survey was a section of demographic questions requesting the following information from teacher respondents: state, school size, school setting, years of experience, portion of students receiving free and reduced lunch (an indicator of socioeconomic status), classes taught in specific teaching areas, whether they had worked with students with special needs in their classrooms/ensembles within the past 3 years, and the specific classes/ensembles in which they had taught students with special needs. Following this section, 11 questions pertaining to effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, and student achievement were listed. For each question, music educators were asked to respond based on their experiences with each of the following specific need categories: autism spectrum disorder, blindness or visual impairment, deaf-blindness, deafness or hearing impairment,

emotional disturbance (including behavior disorder), intellectual disability, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, physical disability (including orthopedic impairment), specific learning disability, speech or language impairment (communication disorder), and traumatic brain injury. These categories were the current disability designations found within IDEA at the time of the study (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2010). A 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *never* to *always* was used to measure each survey item.

Procedure and Sample

The music educators were invited to participate in the study in a cover letter sent via e-mail, which included a brief explanation of the study and link to the survey found on Survey Monkey™, a format that allows respondents to access and complete the survey conveniently and to return it anonymously. Once accessed, respondents were informed that going forward with the survey past the first page, which included a full explanation of the study's purposes and procedures, would indicate that they gave consent to participate in the study, according to institutional review board-approved procedures. In order to obtain the best response possible, the researchers sent a follow-up request 2 weeks after the initial cover letter e-mail, then closed the survey at the end of the 4th week.

Of the 5,000 music educators working in elementary and secondary settings throughout the United States who were contacted, 1,194 teachers representing all 50 states completed the survey, resulting in a 24% response rate. This response rate is consistent with previous research investigating response rates of online, web-based surveys (Hamilton, 2009; Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). Demographic responses indicated that these teachers represented all school sizes, community settings, student socioeconomic statuses, and years of teaching experience (see Table A1 in the online supplemental material for full demographic information, available at <http://jrme.sagepub.com/supplemental>). Additionally, the majority of the respondents ($n = 939$) taught elementary general (58%), middle school/high school (MS/HS) choral (41%), and/or MS/HS instrumental (50%) music classes/ensembles; however, many also taught at least one additional class outside this area (i.e., elementary choral, elementary instrumental, guitar, music theory, music history, music appreciation, music technology, or piano).

Results

Most respondents (99%) reported that *all* students with special needs took music classes (elementary general, 99%) or could elect to take music ensembles (MS/HS choral, 99%; MS/HS instrumental, 98%) in their schools and that they have taught students with special needs in their classrooms/ensembles (elementary general, 100%; MS/HS choral, 99%; MS/HS instrumental 97%). In addition, some respondents also reported that special music class(es) were taught by the music teacher for *all* students

with special needs within self-contained classes (12%) or for only *some* of the students with special needs within self-contained classes (9%) or that a music therapist provided music education for some or all students with special needs (5%).

In regard to perceptions of effectiveness of inclusion, the majority of teachers responded that students with special needs were integrated successfully in music classes (61%) and that their music education needs were being met in regular music classes/ensembles (53%). Additionally, the greatest percentage of teachers did *not* indicate that students with special needs were difficult to work with (44%), that their music education needs would be better met in special education classes (49%), or that they hindered the progress students without disabilities when in regular music classes/ensembles (56%). When analyzed by individual disability category, results revealed similar perceptions of effectiveness of inclusion to the overall results with the exceptions of the responses to the following items: students are integrated successfully (deaf-blindness, 13%; traumatic brain injury, 24%); students' needs are met in regular music classes/ensembles (deaf-blindness, 14%; traumatic brain injury, 22%); students are difficult to work with (emotional disturbance and/or behavior disorder, 64%; multiple disabilities, 39%); students' needs are better met in special education classes (mental retardation, 46%; multiple disabilities, 43%); and students with special needs hinder the progress of peers (emotional disturbance and/or behavior disorder, 59%). General results are listed in Table 1 (see Table A2 in the online supplemental material for full results, available at <http://jrme.sagepub.com/supplemental>).

The results also were analyzed by each demographic designation (i.e., school size, community setting, student socioeconomic status, years of experience, and specialty areas). The results revealed perceptions similar to the overall results; however, the highest percentage of responses, regardless of demographic, indicated that most teachers had not worked with students who were blind/visually impaired, were deaf-blind, were deaf/hearing impaired, or had a traumatic brain injury. This was consistent for all categories of effectiveness questions.

For questions pertaining to curriculum adaptations and/or modifications as well as student achievement, the majority of teachers reported that they were comfortable adapting (62%) or modifying (53%) their regular music education curriculum to meet the needs of students with special needs. Teachers also reported that students with disabilities participated in the same curriculum (63%) and were graded on the same standards of music achievement (38%) as typically developing peers. However, the greatest percentage of teachers believed students with special needs do not display the same level of music achievement as their peers do (42%). When analyzed by individual disability category, results revealed perceptions similar to the overall results, with the exceptions of the following: comfortable adapting (deaf-blindness, 29%; traumatic brain injury, 34%), comfortable modifying (deaf-blindness, 28%; traumatic brain injury, 31%), participate in the same curriculum (deaf-blindness, 28%; traumatic brain injury, 31%), and graded on same standards (blindness/visual impairment, 33%; deaf-blindness, 13%; intellectual disability, 37%; mental retardation, 20%; multiple disabilities, 30%; traumatic brain injury, 14%). For the question pertaining to whether students with special needs display the same level of music achievement as their peers,

Table 1. Percentage of Respondents on Items Concerning Effectiveness of Inclusion, Curriculum Adaptations/Modifications, and Student Achievement (in percentages).

Survey Item	Never/ occasionally	Usually/ always	Not applicable
Inclusion			
Students with special needs are successfully integrated in music classes/ensembles.	12	61	27
Students with special needs' music education needs are being met in regular music classes/ ensembles.	18	53	29
Students with special needs are difficult to work with in my regular music classes/ensembles.	44	30	26
Students with special needs' music education needs would be better met in special education classes.	49	33	19
Having students with special need in regular music classes/ensembles hinders the progress of students without special needs.	56	24	20
Curriculum adaptations/modifications			
I am comfortable adapting my regular music education curriculum to meet the needs of students with special needs.	16	62	22
I am comfortable modifying my regular music education curriculum to meet the needs of students with special needs.	25	53	22
Student achievement			
Students with special needs participate in the same curriculum as their typically developing peers.	15	63	22
Students with special needs are graded on the same standards of musical achievement as their typically developing peers.	37	38	24
Students with special needs display the same level of musical achievement as their typically developing peers.	42	34	24

Note. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and represent the sums of the responses for two survey response choices (*never + occasionally* and *usually + always*). *Not applicable* responses denote if teachers believed the question did not apply to them.

results indicated that the greatest percentage of teachers did not perceive this to be true (autism spectrum disorder, 52%; deafness/hard of hearing, 41%; emotional disturbance and/or behavior disorder, 52%; intellectual disability, 60%; mental retardation, 65%; multiple disabilities, 58%; traumatic brain injury, 33%). General results are listed in Table 1 (see Table A3 in the online supplemental material for full results, available at <http://jrme.sagepub.com/supplemental>).

Are there differences among music educators' perceptions of effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement based on years of teaching experience or on specialty area (i.e., elementary general, MS/HS choral, or MS/HS instrumental)?

No significant differences were found for years of teaching experience when grouped by questions pertaining to effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement. However, based on the results of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) used to compare teachers in the six "teaching experience categories" (see Table A1), teachers who had more than 25 years of experience responded significantly differently from peers with less experience for several individual disability categories within each question. Overall, teachers with more than 25 years of experience perceived that students with special needs were integrated more successfully into their classrooms, had their music needs met in regular music classes, and were less difficult to work with; agreed that their music needs would not be better met in special education classes; and responded that students did not hinder the progress of typically developing peers, compared to perceptions of teachers with less experience. Additionally, this group of teachers perceived they were more successful with adapting and modifying their curriculum for students with special needs than teachers with less experience (see Table A4 in the online supplemental material for the F and p values associated with each survey item for these analyses, available at <http://jrme.sagepub.com/supplemental>).

No significant differences were found for specialty area when grouped by questions pertaining to effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement. However, results of ANOVAs used to compare the categories of elementary, MS/HS choral, and MS/HS instrumental teaching areas indicated that there were significant differences for several individual disability categories within many of the questions. Overall, elementary general music teachers perceived that they were more successful integrating students with special needs into music classrooms, that they were better at adapting and/or modifying their curriculum, and that the students did not hinder the progress of typically developing peers than did teachers who taught MS/HS choral or instrumental ensembles. Compared to perceptions of professionals who taught elementary general or MS/HS choral ensembles, secondary instrumental teachers perceived that students with special needs were more difficult to integrate into their ensembles and that their music needs would be better met in special education classes, even though these same teachers also perceived that the music needs of students with special needs were met in the instrumental ensembles. Responses of secondary choral teachers indicated that they were more likely to grade students with special needs on the same standards of music achievement as typically developing peers as compared with elementary general or instrumental music educators (see Table A4 in the online supplemental material for the F and p values associated with each survey item for these analyses, available at <http://jrme.sagepub.com/supplemental>).

How frequently do music educators address music versus nonmusic objectives as their primary teaching focus?

Overall, music educators reported that they addressed music goals (64%) more so than nonmusic goals (36%) when working with students with special needs in their classrooms/ensembles. These perceptions also were found when responses were analyzed by individual disability categories, with the exceptions of mental retardation (music, 44%; nonmusic, 56%) and traumatic brain injury (music, 40%; nonmusic, 60%). When grouped by years of teaching experience or specialty area, teachers reported similar perceptions regardless of how long they had been in the profession (1–5 years, range = 43%–82%; 6–10 years, range = 46%–78%; 11–15 years, range = 37%–85%; 16–20 years, range = 43%–85%; 21–25 years, range = 39%–87%; more than 25 years, range = 28%–87%) or their specialty area (elementary general, range = 41%–86%; MS/HS choral, range = 34%–83%; MS/HS instrumental, range = 41%–83%). For each of these groupings, however, responses indicated that students with mental retardation or a traumatic brain injury were more likely to work on nonmusic goals than were peers with other special needs.

What are the similarities and differences among music educators' perceptions of the effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement when working with students with special needs found within the current study and the results found within the Gfeller et al. (1990) study?

The current survey was designed to match the instrument used by Gfeller et al. (1990) as closely as possible, although exact replication was not feasible due to national, state, and local modifications to terminology, legislation, and educational philosophies over the last two decades. Still, the crux of the items about effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations and/or modifications, and student achievement used within the Gfeller et al. study also were used within the current study. Thus, several similarities and differences could be identified between the two regarding music educators' perceptions over the last 20 years. Specifically, roughly the same percentage of teachers responded that students with special needs were integrated effectively in music (2011, 62%; 1990, 61%), that their needs were being met in regular music (2011, 53%; 1990, 52%), and that they were expected to participate in the same music objectives as students without special needs (2011, 63%; 1990, 62%). Additionally, music educators' perceptions of difficulty in working with students with speech or language impairments were very similar between the two studies (2011, 22%; 1990, 21%). Conversely, teachers had different perceptions regarding whether music education needs of students with special needs were better met in special education classes (2011, 33%; 1990, 50%), whether having students with special needs in regular music hindered the progress of students without special needs (2011, 29%; 1990, 61%), and whether the teachers' primary objective with students with special needs was

development of nonmusic goals (2011, 36%; 1990, 67%). Teachers in the current study also responded that students with hearing impairments (2011, 29%; 1990, 40%) or those with specific learning disabilities (2011, 23%; 1990, 35%) were not as difficult to work with as did teachers in the earlier study. The full set of comparisons is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents in Agreement With Items Concerning Effectiveness of Inclusion and Difficulty in Working With Students With Various Disabilities for Data Reported in 1990 and 2011.

Survey Item	Gfeller et al. Study	Current Study
Effectiveness of inclusion		
Students with special needs are effectively integrated in music.	62	61
Students with special needs' music education needs are being met in regular music.	52	53
Students with special needs' music education needs are better met in special education classes.	50	33
Having students with special needs in regular music hinders progress of students without special needs.	61	29
My primary objective with students with special needs is development of nonmusical goals.	67	36
I am expected to adapt regular music education goals/objectives for students with special needs.	57	62
I expect students with special needs to participate in the same musical objectives and programming as students without special needs.	62	63
I grade students with special needs on the same standards of musical achievement as students without special needs.	32	38
Difficulty in working with various disabilities		
Students with emotional disturbances or behavior disorders are difficult to work with.	56	64
Students with hearing impairments are difficult to work with.	40	29
Students who are mentally retarded are difficult to work with.	37	33
Students who have specific learning disabilities are difficult to work with.	35	23
Students with visual impairments are difficult to work with.	25	20
Students with physical disabilities are difficult to work with.	21	16
Students with speech or language impairments are difficult to work with.	21	22
Students with other health impairments are difficult to work with.	9	19

Note. The Gfeller, Darrow, and Hedden (1990) study had 350 respondents. The current study (data collected 2011) had 1,194 respondents. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and represent the sum of responses in the *agree* and *strongly agree* categories.

Discussion

The purpose of this research project was to examine whether music teachers' perceptions of effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, or student achievement had altered from previous research findings 20 years before. In regard to effectiveness of inclusion, teachers generally reported that the students were integrated successfully, their music needs were being met, they were not difficult to work with, their music needs would not be better met in special education classes, and they did not hinder the progress of typically developing peers in their music classes/ensembles. These results are slightly different than those found by Gfeller et al. (1990), who reported that the majority of respondents believed students were mainstreamed effectively but also that the students' music education needs would be better met in special education classes and that they hindered the progress of nondisabled peers when in the regular music class. Twenty years ago, Gfeller et al. (1990) stated,

What are possible interpretations for this lack of consensus? Perhaps there is a lack of clarity among educators concerning what actually constitutes successful mainstreaming. According to PL 94-142, a student should be mainstreamed only if the regular classroom setting provides adequate education support. Moreover, successful mainstreaming practices should not hinder the progress of nonhandicapped students. (p. 96)

Results of the current study seem to indicate that music educators better understand what constitutes successful inclusion. Reasons for this may include better preservice or in-service training, such as more course offerings (Colwell & Thompson, 2000; Heller, 1995; Salvador, 2010), NAFME workshops, and school district in-services. Another possible reason may be that teachers have become accustomed to integrating students in their classes/ensembles and no longer perceive working with these special populations to be as problematic as in the past. As Jellison and Taylor (2007) stated, "From 1975 to the present, many changes [have] occurred both in public policy and in general social attitudes concerning individuals with disabilities" (p. 10). This may be particularly true because the majority of teachers responding to our survey had taught fewer than 25 years, well after the passing of PL 94-142 and, for most, after the Gfeller et al. (1990) study was completed.

Overall, teachers' responses indicated that they were comfortable adapting and/or modifying their regular curriculum to meet the needs of students with special needs. The majority of respondents also reported that students in these special populations participated in the same curriculum and were graded on the same standards of music achievement. These results seem to indicate that the teachers believed adaptations or modifications made to the original curriculum did not constitute such a unique program of study that students with special needs could not participate and be graded on course content. Teachers also reported that most students with special needs, regardless of disability, did not display the same level of music achievement as typically developing peers did. However, for the majority of participants, the primary overall objective for students with special needs was working on music goals. This result is

also different from the Gfeller et al. (1990) study data, in which the primary focus (67%) was nonmusic goals. As those researchers stated,

If music educators are to uphold the true spirit of PL 94-142, mainstreamed students should be graded on similar standards and expected to achieve the same musical objectives set for nonhandicapped students. At present, it appears that teachers are unclear of what educational objectives are appropriate. If music educators abandon regular musical objectives to accommodate the handicapped student in the mainstream, they are, at least in part, responsible for the continued poor implementation of mainstreaming practices. (Gfeller et al., 1990, p. 100)

Thus, the results of the current study seem to indicate progress toward understanding what constitutes effective inclusion. They also indicate that teachers' perceptions have shifted to the attainment of music education goals regardless of whether students with special needs reach the same level as their peers. In addition, it seems as though participants realized that students with special needs may not attain the same level of achievement as their peers but can accomplish *some level* of music achievement. This result further indicates that teachers better understand what constitutes successful inclusion as compared to 20 years ago.

Students with certain disabilities were perceived as being more difficult to work with than others in both the current and the Gfeller et al. (1990) study. For the current study, students with emotional disturbances and/or behavior disorders, speech and language disabilities, and other health impairments were reported as more difficult to work with as compared with results reported 20 years ago (Gfeller et al., 1990). This may be due to the nature and severity of these particular disabilities in regard to participating in a music class/ensemble or to the teachers' personal experiences working with students with these disabilities. Past research on music educators' perceptions of working with students with severe disabilities revealed that behavior disorders, attention deficit disorders, and learning disabilities were perceived as most problematic; however, no mention was made regarding perceived difficulties working with students with speech and language disabilities or other health impairments (Darrow, 1999). Therefore, it may be possible the multiple variations within these specific disabilities in the current study contributed to the teachers' perceptions. Future research, however, is needed before assumptions are drawn.

Conclusion

In this study, we sought to examine whether music teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of inclusion, curriculum adaptations/modifications, and student achievement when working with students with special needs in their classrooms/ensembles have changed since previous research findings from 20 years ago. Results indicated more positive responses as compared with the Gfeller et al. (1990) study in regard to a number of questions; however, there are still several specific areas that need attention. And, while the sample did not encompass large numbers of teachers within each state,

results indicated no significant differences among responses when split by geographical location (e.g., state or NAFME regional divisions); therefore, it is likely that the changes discovered may be generalizable to music educators across the United States. Thus, equipped with the knowledge contained herein, universities and school district representatives may better understand where to address possible deficits with their music educators in order to help them successfully teach all students with special needs in their classrooms/ensembles.

Supplemental Material

Tables A1-A4 are available at <http://jrme.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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